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# Marketing Research Investigates Quality Loss

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Few people realize the various steps that are involved in getting the raw product to the consumer.

# MARKETING Investigates

By Ken Krause

**F**ARM PRODUCTS rise a great deal in value as they move from the farm to the consumer, because of the cost of marketing services required to get them to consumers. On the average, the costs of such services make up more than half of the prices consumers pay for farm products.

Farmers, marketing firms, and consumers have a sharp interest in these costs—the farmer because of their effect on his sales; consumers because higher food prices can pinch their purchases and pocketbook.

Marketing costs have risen year by year for more than a decade. This trend poses a major question. Can new cost-savings be found to offset or slow down this rise, or will retail prices of farm products continue upward to the point of restricting sales? You as a college graduate may work in one of the areas of cost-savings.

For instance you may work as a research scientist in quality control. Quality is one of the major keys to success in marketing farm commodities.

It affects prices, sales volume of marketing, and the consumer's decision to buy or not to buy a particular product.

But quality is an elusive thing. The quality of a product may be high at the time of harvest by the farmer, but be greatly reduced by the time it goes through the marketing chain.

Here, you as a research scientist would be concerned with one of three major areas of study—all related to reducing spoilage. These methods are:

- 1) Developing methods for preventing and controlling insects and microorganisms that attack farm products in marketing channels.

- 2) Avoiding damage and spoilage by finding improved methods of handling, packaging, and holding products in storage, transit, and distribution.

- 3) Finding ways of measuring quality in agricultural products that lead to better and more accurate grading.

Quality losses occur in most commodities throughout the marketing process. Many of these losses are of a biological nature caused by diseases or insects that attack the product after it has been produced. Losses are also caused by chemical and physical changes within the food itself, influenced by temperature, humidity, and other factors.

During the past several years, marketing research scientists have proved that a significant part of the spoilage loss suffered in the marketing processes can be prevented or controlled. It's easy to see that the more spoilage that occurs, the higher will be the cost of marketing farm products.

Research that leads to ways and means of reducing this spoilage

means a higher quality product in retail stores that is more attractive and satisfying to the consumer. This is a goal of both producers and marketers.

Marketing research working on spoilage control include pathologists who study decay, spotting discoloration, and other types of spoilage in



Homemaker and Agriculturist

# RESEARCH QUALITY LOSS

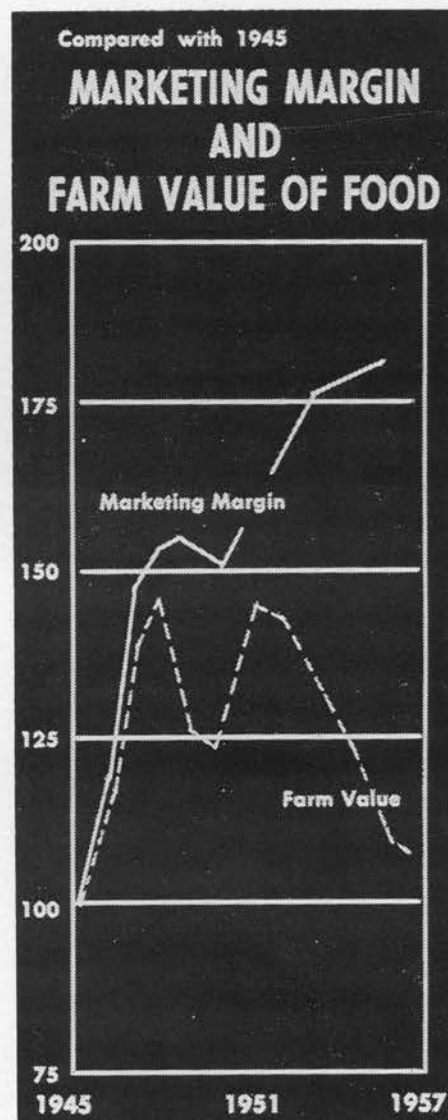
This graph illustrates the cost of marketing services compared to that of farm value. It is readily seen that the value of the raw product rises a great deal from the time it leaves the farm to the time it reaches the consumer. On the average the cost of marketing services make up more than half of the price that consumers will have to pay.

marketing channels; horticulturists and engineers, who study temperature, humidity and other requirements of fruit and vegetables in storage and transit; and others who study the chemical and physical changes that lead to quality reduction of plant and animal products after they leave the farm.

Entomologists work on methods to prevent insect damage in marketing, and chemists are employed to work on new insecticides and residue problems in handling farm products. Still other specialists study grading, washing, drying, and packaging to determine the causes of mechanical damage done by machinery.

Packaging materials and types of packages are studied to determine their protective qualities. Loss of grade in processed turkeys, for example, is of serious economic concern to turkey processors. Reasons for the losses are many. Too often bruises, broken bones, and torn skins result from struggles of the birds during their removal from coops or during shackling, sticking, and bleeding. To reduce losses from these causes, researchers have recommended completely immobilizing the birds by gassing them with carbon dioxide in the processing line.

Tremendous interest has been aroused in the grain trade by recent tests that demonstrate how fumigants can be distributed uniformly through a mass of grain by adapting mechanical aeration systems to circulate the gas. Coupled with the elimination of the age old process of turning the grain by moving it physically through the air, this discovery can be of major importance in reducing storage costs of grain and at the same time maintaining its quality.



Another area of marketing research that you might work in is concerned with up-to-date facilities, equipment, layout, and work methods in order to hold down the costs of handling at each step in the marketing channel.

In their path from the farm to the consumer, farm products move through a succession of facilities—packing sheds, livestock auctions, grain elevators, processing plants, storage houses, wholesale food distribution. Such facilities must be in the right place, properly designed, adequate in size, and properly equipped and operated.

As production areas change, volume increases, transportation methods shift, and wage rates go up. Old market facilities must be modified and new facilities built.

The area of marketing research is fabulous. It's up to you to choose a particular phase and train yourself for it.

